

Genesis 2:4b-3:24 as the Cosmogonic Ground
for Israelite Ethical, Cultic, Covenantal, &
Sapiential Traditions

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Narrative Structure of Gen 1:1-3:24

Key

S = synoptic (headline / topic)

R & E = resumptive & expansion (of the topic)

M-S = meta-synoptic (all preceding synoptics form topical basis for final *R & E*)

Narrative Structure

(*S*₁) Gen 1:1-2

(*R & E*₁) Gen 1:3-2:4a

(*S*₂) Gen 1:26-31

(*R & E*₂) Gen 2:4b-24

(*S*₃) Gen 2:18-24 / (*M-S*) Gen 1:1; 1:26-31; 2:18-24

(*R & E*₃) Gen 2:25-3:24

Gen 2:4b-25 as *RESUMPTIVE & EXPANSIVE*₂ of Gen 1:26-31, *SYNOPTIC*₂

^{4b}When the LORD God (*'ēlōhīm yhw̄h*) made (*'āśā*) the earth and the heavens¹—⁵no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth nor had any plant of the field sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no earthling (*'ādām*) to work (*la'ābōd*) the soil (*'ādāmā*). ⁶Rather, streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the soil (*'ādāmā*)—⁷So the LORD God formed (*yāšar*) the earthling as dust (*'āfār*) from the soil (*'ādāmā*) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the earthling (*hā'ādām*) became a living being.

⁸Now the LORD God had planted a garden in Eden, (in the) east [in ancient times];² and there he put (*śīm*) the earthling he had formed (*yāšar*). ⁹Further, the LORD God had made every kind of tree sprout from the soil³— (trees) pleasing to look at and wholesome for food.⁴ In addition, the Tree of Life⁵ was in the middle of the garden along with the Tree of Knowing⁶ Good and Bad.⁷

¹⁰A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it separated (*pārad*) into four headwaters. ¹¹The name of the first is Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹² (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there).⁸ ¹³The name of the second river is Gihon; it winds through

¹The reversal of the order of Gen 1:1 (“heavens and the earth”) is striking. In both instances, a foundational distinction (common to all cosmogonic literature) is made between things “earthly” and things “heavenly.”

² Note the associations of wisdom with the East in a variety of biblical texts (cf. Job 1:1-3; 2:11-13; 32:15; 1 Kgs 10:1-13; Isa 2:6; Matt 2:1-12). Also, note the traditions, particularly in theophanic texts, that associate the origins of Yahweh from regions of the East (i.e. Edom, and Northern Arabian peninsula): Deut 33:2; Jdgs 5:4-5; Ps 29:8; Ps 68-7-10, 17-18).

³ Note that this is something that the primordial human will be able to do only with great difficulty, outside the garden. It is something which Cain will be prohibited from doing at all (i.e. he is driven from the soil).

⁴Note that this aesthetic and utilitarian appraisal, though in the mouth of the narrator, must reflect the perspective of the LORD God. Cf. discussion of 3:6b below where we see a similar evaluation from the woman as she is being “deceived” by the serpent.

⁵For the phrase or concept of “Tree of Life” in other contexts, see the following: Prov 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4; Rev 22:2, 14, 19 (cf. Ezk 47:7-12); cf. also the Apocrypha: 2 Esd 2:12; 8:52; 4 Macc 18:16.

⁶We should interpret *da'at* (“knowing”) as a gerund. The root *yd'* is multivalent, indicating not only the functions of cognition but most especially intimacy or familiarity with (cf. *HALOT*, 390-93). Thus, we should be alert to this multivalency in each attestation of this root in our study.

⁷If the primordial couple have enduring life by either by virtue of proximity to the Tree of Life or by virtue of eating its fruit, perhaps they also have a modicum of moral capability by virtue of living in proximity to the Tree of Knowing Good and Bad. Thus, the *double entendre* inherent in the name of this tree (i.e. “the tree which gives moral discernment”; “the tree which conveys comprehensive knowledge” comes into play in the commandment of 2:16. What the LORD God proscribes from humanity is not the attempt to acquire moral discernment (which they may insipiently already possess) but the attempt to deny their derived status by possessing comprehensive knowledge. The latter does seem to comprise the seductive aspect of the serpent’s approach to the woman at 3:5.

⁸This statement shows not only a utilitarian evaluation of these materials but also an aesthetic appreciation of them in the mind of the narrator. However, this appraisal would be difficult to separate from the divine perspective as well.

the entire land of Cush. ¹⁴The name of the third river is Tigris; it runs along the east side of Aššur. And the fourth river is Euphrates.

¹⁵The LORD God took the man and he situated (*nû^ah*) him⁹ in the Garden of Eden to work it (*‘ābad*) and take care of / guard (*šāmar*) it.¹⁰ ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded (*šivvā*)¹¹ the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷but you must not eat from the Tree of Knowing Good and Bad (*‘ēš hadda‘at tōb vārā‘*), for when you eat of it you must die.”¹²

⁹The use of *nû^ah* here is unusual and unexpected. The verbal form is attested in cultic contexts: (1) placing a jar of manna before the Ark of the Covenant (Exod 16:33-35); (2) Aaron’s placement of his vestments in the holy place after officiating on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:23); (3) with respect to placing the staffs of tribal leaders before the Ark of the Covenant in resolving priestly leadership (Num 17:19[4], 22[7]); (4) representing the offering of first fruits before the LORD while reciting Israel’s “creed” (Deut 26:4, 10).

The verbal root is also attested in connection with the Noah’s ark on the Mountains of Ararat (cf. Gen 8:4); Pentateuchal legislation regarding the Sabbath (cf. Exod 20:11; 23:12 (Deut 5:14); Yahweh’s decision to accompany Israel on her journey to Canaan and to give them rest (Exod 33:14); regarding the spirit of prophecy upon Eldad and Medad in the camp of Israel (Num 11:26); Deuteronomic promises of rest from Israel’s enemies in the Promised Land (cf. Deut 12:10; 25:19); as a threat to the new wilderness generation to let them “rest” in the desert with their ancestors (Num 32:15);

There is an interesting inner-biblical use of this root in the Flood Narrative which establishes it as a major thematic trajectory in Gen 1-11. Through the birth and naming of Noah (*nō^ah*), Lamech had hoped his son might bring to humanity “comfort” (*ō nhm*) “from the work and painful toil of our hands due to the soil which Yahweh had cursed” (Gen 5:28-29). It is significant that when Noah, as a new primordial human, emerges from the ark into a world purged from all impurity that Yahweh does remove the curse against the soil (Gen 8:21). This new “Adam,” as it were, is also a horticulturist (Gen 9:20). In our text, then, we may have an adumbration of what is to follow. If so, the idea might be: as the primordial man worked the soil both in and out of the Garden, so the new “Adam,” Noah, begins life anew outside the ark as a tiller of the soil. Thus, to the extent that Noah is a reprise of primordial man in the garden, so primordial man anticipates Noah and the “new world.”

¹⁰Both terms are found in contexts of horticulture; however, both terms are also heavily utilized in cultic contexts. In addition, *šāmar* is frequently attested in the Torah in ethical / covenantal contexts (particularly Deuteronomy) and in our wisdom literature. For its attestations in ethical / covenantal applications in Deuteronomy, see the following: 2:4; 4:2, 6, 9, 15, 23, 40; 5:1, 10, 12, 26, 29; 6:2, 3, 12, 17; 7:8-9, 11-12; 8:1-2, 6, 11-12, 25; 10:13; 11:1, 8, 16, 22, 32; 12:1, 28; 13:1, 5, 19; 15:5; 16:1, 12; 17:10, 19; 19:9; 23:10, 24; 24:8; 26:16-18; 27:1; 28:1, 9, 13, 15, 45, 58; 29:8; 30:10, 16; 31:12; 32:46; 33:9. For its use in Proverbs, see the following: 2:8, 11; 3:26; 4:4, 6, 21; 5:2; 6:22, 24; 7:2, 5; 8:32, 34; 10:17; 13:3, 18; 14:3; 15:5; 16:17; 19:8, 16; 21:23; 22:5; 27:18; 29:18.

¹¹This is the first occurrence of *šivvā* in Scripture. Humanity is now put under the *mišvā* of the LORD God (cross-reference to a later allusion to this command 3:17). The occurrence of this word in our context adds to the ethical / covenantal / cultic tone of our narrative. Note especially the occurrence of *mišvā* in Proverbs: 2:1; 3:1; 4:4; 6:3, 20; 7:1-2; 10:8; 13:13; 19:16.

¹²The dual sense embedded in the phrase “knowing good and bad” comes into play here. On a surface reading, it appears that the LORD God wishes to deny to humankind acquisition of moral and ethical discretionary powers. Much scholarly labor has been spent over why and how this could be the intent of God. By recognizing, however, that the phrase is capable of *double entendre* through deployment of a merism (i.e. “Good and Bad” = everything), it is seen that the intent of the LORD God is to enforce the boundary between his own underived nature and the derived and contingent nature of man. Thus, the LORD God prohibits the acquiring of comprehensive knowledge. It is this *double entendre* of the merism that the serpent uses to entice and seduce the woman, thus showing his “craftiness” (*‘ārûm*, cf. 3:1-5).

If the tree is a “sacred” tree and the premises are “holy,” then we may parallel this “center” of the garden to the sancta of later Israel that similarly stipulated capital punishment for encroachment upon them (see below). It would seem then that the penalty for eating is death (literally). However, two points must be made: (1) the

Synoptic 3: Gen 2:18-24

¹⁸The LORD God said, “It is not good¹³ for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him (*‘e‘ēšeh lō‘ēzer k^onegdō*.” ¹⁹Now the LORD God had (already) formed (*yāšar*) out of the soil (*‘ādāmâ*) all the beasts of the field (*ḥayyat haššādeh*) and all the birds of the air.¹⁴ So now he brought them to the man to see what he would name (*qārā’*) them; and whatever the man called (*qārā’*) each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰So the man gave names (*qārā’*) to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.¹⁵ But for the man no suitable helper (*‘ēzer k^onegdō*) was found. ²¹So the LORD God caused a deep sleep (*tardēmâ*)¹⁶ to fall upon the man; and while he was sleeping, he removed one of the man’s ribs (*šēlā’*) and closed up the place with flesh (*bāšār*). ²²Then the LORD God crafted (*bānâ*) a woman (*‘iššâ*) from the rib (*šēlā’*) he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. ²³The man said,

“Finally! Bone (*‘ešem*) of my bones (*‘āšāmay* and flesh (*bāšār*) of my flesh (*b^ošārî*); she shall be called ‘woman’ (*‘iššâ*) for she was taken out of man (*‘iš*).”

²⁴For this reason a man will leave (*‘āzab*) his father and mother and cling to (*dāḥaq*) to his wife,¹⁷ and they will become one flesh (*bāšār*).¹⁸

human is already mortal (though there is no reason to believe that he knows this); (2) the category of “death” cannot possibly have been understood by him. Thus, the serpent “does get it right,” as it were, in 3:4b where he contradicts the notion that the humans (now a primordial couple) will physically die as a result of eating from the Tree of Knowing Good and Bad. Since humanity is by its derived nature mortal and since neither of them does in fact physically die at the time of eating from the forbidden tree, we are left to conclude that the LORD God exercises grace in the face of the law’s violation.

However, if this text is a wisdom text, we ought to hear in the threat of dying the warning of the father, the mother, the counsellor, the wise king, and of Lady Wisdom herself that folly and simple-mindedness without the “fear of Yahweh” is a “way of death.” That is, “death” characterizes the lives of those who are enticed and seduced by Dame Folly in all her representations: see Prov 2:18; 5:5; 8:36; 10:2; 11:4; 12:28; 13:14; 14:12, 27; 16:14, 25; 18:21; 21:6 (cf. also Deut 30:19). Thus, in our text the warning of death is multivalent; it reaches beyond the couple’s learning of their mortality to embrace the consequences of disobedience as a path of alienation from true life and the God of life.

¹³First occurrence of anything “not good” in God’s creation.

¹⁴By interpreting the perfect tense here as a past perfect, the sequence of creation broadly parallels that of chapter 1 where the world’s fauna are created on the same “day” as humans, but chronologically prior.

¹⁵Giving names is part of the dominion delegated by God to humankind (cf. Gen 1:26-31); however, it is more important to see the cosmogonic implications of such naming (viz. specification, delineation, differentiating).

¹⁶This term for sleep or stupor is found in the following places: Isa 29:10; Prov 19:15; Job 4:13; 33:15; Gen 15:12; 1 Sam 26:12.

¹⁷ This is an interesting expression for the founding of an independent home. It indicates that the non-blood connection of a man to his wife (under usual circumstances), “trumps,” as it were, blood connections.

¹⁸Obvious anticipation of sexual intimacy.

Gen 2:25-3:24 as *RESUMPTIVE & EXPANSIVE*₃ of Gen 2:18-24, *SYNOPTIC*₃.

²⁵ The man (*hā'ādām*) and his wife (*'ištō*) were both naked (*'ārummîm*); however, they felt no shame. ¹Now the serpent (*nāḥāš*) was more crafty (*'ārûm*)¹⁹ than any of the wild animals (*ḥayyat ḥaṣṣadeh*) the LORD God (*'ēlōhîm yhw̄h*) had made.²⁰ He said to the woman, “Is it really the case that God (*'ēlōhîm*)²¹ said, ‘You two must not eat from any of the trees in the garden?’”²² ²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,³ but God (*'ēlōhîm*) did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden;²³ furthermore, neither of you must touch it, or the two of you will die.’”²⁴ ⁴“There is no way either of you will die,” the serpent said to the woman. ⁵“For God (*'ēlōhîm*) knows (*yōdē^a*) that when the two of you eat of it your eyes will be opened (*pāqah*), and ***the two of you will be like God ('ēlōhîm), knowing (lāda‘at) good and bad***” (cf. 3:22).²⁵

¹⁹This adj. carries the notion of being cunning or clever; in contrast to terms for naive, simple, dull-witted, insolent, or foolish (viz. *pefî, kēsîl, 'ēvîl* (cf. *HALOT*, 883). This term occurs in Proverbs: 12:16, 23 (“prudent”); 13:16; 14:8, 15, 18; 22:3; 27:12 (all in a positive sense rendered “prudent” in NIV), and in Job: 5:12; 15:5 (all in a negative sense rendered “crafty”). The noun formation, *'ormâ* “cleverness,” “cunning,” or “trick” (*HALOT*, 886) appears in the wisdom literature at Prov 1:4; 8:5, 12 (all with a positive sense rendered “prudence” in the NIV) and at Job 5:13 (in a negative sense rendered “craftiness” in the NIV). The two verb formations of this root at Prov 15:5 and 19:25 are rendered positively “gain / learn prudence” in the NIV).

²⁰As the narrative unfolds, it becomes apparent that the serpent (*nāḥāš*), portrayed here as among the animals of the field, has a representational function. Ethically and morally, it represents non-God alternatives. Against the backdrop of the ancient Near Eastern world, the “serpent” is one of several representations of “chaos-causing” powers which impinge negatively upon the lives of humans. These powers function to explain the origins of or proportions of pain, suffering, and disorientation.

²¹Note that in the exchange between the serpent and the woman deity is referred to exclusively as *'ēlōhîm*, not *'ēlōhîm yhw̄h*, otherwise used exclusively from 2:4b-3:24.

²²This is an obvious distortion of the truth of the situation. By casting matters this way, the serpent forces the woman to respond.

²³We are reminded here that as readers we know of two remarkable trees “in the middle of the garden,” only one of which is known and proscribed to the primordial couple: viz. the “Tree of Knowing Good and Bad.”

²⁴How does the woman come to know the LORD God’s proscriptions? According to the narrative, the proscription was given to (now) her husband before she was formed and presented to the man. Thus, the woman’s knowledge of divine proscription regarding the tree comes to her through her husband and any further elaboration which may have accrued in her own imagination. Cf. the stipulations placed upon the Kohathites who in their carrying the holy things of the tabernacle must not touch them or even look upon them, lest they die (Num 4:15-20; cf. also 1:51). See also the provisions imposed upon Aaron and his sons at the investiture of their offices and in their various duties “so that they will not die, Lev 8:33-35; 10:6-11; 16:2, 13; 22:9; Num 18:30-32. See Lev 15:31; Num 3:10, 38; 18:7 which imposes capital punishment upon Israelites who encroach upon the holiness of the Tabernacle and its enclosures in an unclean state. For the imposition of death upon Israelites for various offenses, see Lev 20:9-27; 21:9; 24:16-23; 27:29; Num 15:32-36; 35:16-34. Here, however, the threat is an empty one, it seems, for the primordial couple do not yet have a category for the meaning of death, even though they have been created mortal (another reality of which they are not yet aware).

²⁵The duplicity of the serpent is here seen in his playing off the *double entendre* of the phrase “knowing good and bad.” What he “offers” the woman is the prospect of comprehensive knowledge (i.e. omniscience = godlikeness). This seems to be demonstrated by the following verse (6).

⁶When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom (*haškil*),²⁶ she took some and ate it.²⁷ She also gave some to her husband (*'išāh*), who was with her (*'immāh*), and he ate it.²⁸ ⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened (*pāqah*), and they realized (*yāda'*) they were naked (*'ērūmmīm*); so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸Then they heard the sound (*qôl*)²⁹ of the LORD God patrolling (*mithallēk*) the garden in the cool of the day,³⁰ and the man and his wife hid themselves from the LORD God in the midst of the trees of the garden.³¹ ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" ¹⁰He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid³² because I was naked (*'ērōm*); so I hid." ¹¹And he said, "Who told you that you were naked (*'ērōm*)? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" ¹²The man said, "The woman you put here with me (*'immādi*)—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." ¹³Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me (*hiššī'anī*), and I ate."

¹⁴So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed (*'ārūr*) are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals (*ḥayyat haššādeh*)! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust (*'āfār*) all the days

²⁶Remarkably, this is an aesthetic and ethical evaluation which the woman has the capacity to arrive at in the process of being "seduced" by the serpent (cf. very similar language at 1:9). How does she come to have these evaluative powers? Do they emerge only in the presenting of non-god alternatives? If so, we witness in chapter 3 the maturation toward moral capacity as a function of "temptation." It seems as though there is both a "yes" and a "no" to the question: Does the primordial couple have any moral capacity prior to the enticement by the serpent? There is sufficient [innate?] capacity to make temptation and seduction real and not a chimera. On the other hand, the reader does witness through this story of succumbing to the enticement the coming into full flower of humanity's moral and ethical capacities (cf. 3:22).

The root *škl* (primarily in the *hif'îl* = "understand," "comprehend," "have insight," "make wise, insightful," "achieve success," *HALOT*, 1328-29), has only positive connotations. See its occurrences in Proverbs: 1:3; 10:5, 19; 14:35; 15:24; 16:20, 23; 17:2, 8; 19:14; 21:11-12, 16; attestations in Job are: 22:2; 34:27, 35. The cognate noun, *šekel* / *šēkel* = "insight," "understanding," "success" is attested at Proverbs 3:4; 12:8; 13:15; 16:22; 19:11; 23:9 and at Job 17:4.

²⁷We have here a paradigmatic narrative portrayal of "being wise in one's own eyes." For this phrase and its permutations in the wisdom literature, see in Proverbs: 3:7; 16:2; 26:5, 12; 30:12, and in Job 32:1.

²⁸In the light of 3:17, it is important here to note that there is no conversation recorded here between the woman and the man. Thus, what the man heard for which is held culpable must have been the interchange between the serpent and the woman (at which he was present). With respect to the latter, the preposition *'im* here connotes proximity in space, action, and / or relationship.

²⁹This is a theophany. One could argue that it is Scripture's 2nd theophanic portrayal (cf. Gen 1:2).

³⁰Cf. similar, if not enigmatic language at Deut 23:14[15] where the LORD God patrols, as it were, in the midst of the camp of Israel to rescue them and to hand over their enemies to their face so that the camp might remain holy and so that God might not see in the camp any defilement which would cause him to turn away from them.

³¹This seems to indicate that they hid themselves "at the scene of the crime," as it were. However, "midst of the garden" (cf. 2:9) and "midst of the trees of the garden" may not designate the same precise place.

³²This text marks the first occurrence in Scripture of the concept of "the fear of the LORD / God." For other references, see the following texts, first in Proverbs and Job, then in Deuteronomy: Prov 1:7, 29; 2:5; 3:7; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:2, 26-27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17; 24:21; Job: 1:9 (*'ēlōhîm*); 4:6 (*'ēlōhîm*); 6:14 (*šadday*); 9:35 (*'ēl*, *'ēlōāh*); 15:4 (*'ēl*); [25:2]; 28:28 (*'ādōnāy*); 37:24 (*šadday*); Deut: 4:10; 5:29; 6:2, 13, 24; 10:12, 20; 13:4; 14:23; 17:19; 25:18; 31:12-13. See also the phrase "fear of the Lord" in Sirach (Ben Sira) at the following places: 1:11-12, 18, 27-28, 30; 2:10; 9:16; 10:22; 16:2; 19:20; 21:11; 23:27; 25:6; 25:11; 27:3; 40:26-27; 45:23; 50:29.

of your life.³³ ¹⁵And I will put enmity (*'ēbâ*) between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush (*šûf*) your head, though you may crush (*šûf*) his heel.”

¹⁶To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing great (*harbâ 'arbeh 'iṣṣ⁰bônēk w⁰hērōnēk*); with pain (*'eṣeb*) you will give birth to children. Your desire (*t⁰šûqâ*)³⁴ will be for your husband, and he will rule (*māšal*) over you.”

¹⁷To the man he said, “Because you listened to the speech (*qôl*) of your wife, yet you ate³⁵ from the tree about which I (explicitly) commanded ³⁶you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ cursed (*'ārâr*) is the soil (*'ādāmâ*) because of you (*ba'ābûr*); through painful toil (*'iṣṣābôn*) you will eat from its produce all the days of your life.³⁷ ¹⁸The soil will sprout thorns and thistles in response to your efforts; however, you may eat the vegetation of the (open) field (*'ēšeb hasšādeh*).³⁸ ¹⁹By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the soil (*'ādāmâ*), since from it you were taken; for dust (*'āfār*) you are and to dust (*'āfār*) you will return.”³⁹

²⁰The man named (*qārâ'*) his wife Eve (*havvâ*), because she would become the mother of all the living. ²¹The LORD God made garments of skin⁴⁰ for the man and his wife and clothed them.⁴¹ ²²And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing (*yōdē'ā*) good and bad.⁴² He must not be allowed to reach out his

³³The serpent will die.

³⁴This word is found elsewhere only at 4:7 and in the Song of Songs 7:11.

³⁵From the standpoint of the narrative, the woman said nothing to the man before she offered “forbidden fruit” to the man. Thus, the reference must be to her conversation with the serpent; thus, “you heard everything going on, and you expressly violated what I had personally commanded.”

³⁶For the first mention of “command,” see 2:16.

³⁷As with the serpent (cf. 3:14) so here this phrase indicates the earthling’s measure of life; that is, his mortal condition as a created being.

³⁸This cannot mean harvesting produce from land under cultivation would be impossible; this reality would come only with Cain (cf. 4:2 and 4:11-12). However, it does indicate that agricultural cultivation will be (extraordinarily) infested with thorns and thistles, since the soil is under a curse (i.e. it is not allowed to fulfill its creational purpose). The man may therefore make supplement his thwarted agricultural efforts as a gatherer of vegetation that grows wild in the open field.

³⁹The man’s mortality is made explicit.

⁴⁰Ostensibly, animals are slain by God for this utilitarian purpose. Thus, the LORD God initiates the slaughter of animal life. This may be foundation for the LORD’s regard for Abel’s sacrifice (note its description as in 4:4, “some of the the female first born of his flock and their fat portions” which comports well with later substitutionary role of the Levites for Israel’s firstborn (Num 8) as well as the importance of offering fat upon the altar (cf. Exodus and Leviticus). On the other hand, the failure of Cain’s offering to please the LORD may derive from the fact that it was produce from the soil which the LORD God had cursed.

⁴¹In this regard, see the stipulation in the Book of the Covenant that proscribes ascending the LORD’s altar on steps which would reveal the priest’s nakedness / genitalia the altar. As a further remedy against this eventuality see Exod 28:42-43.

⁴²Yahweh affirms the human reality which the serpent had promised by way of enticement. However, the other arm of the *double entendre* is now drawn upon. The serpent had enticed the human couple with the promise of comprehensive knowledge and ability. However, it is now clear that the more transparent meaning “good and bad” is meant: viz. humanity’s moral and ethical potential. Human capacity to function fully as a moral and ethical agent has been achieved. Thus, humanity is now ready to enter into the good world created for such choices and actions (cf. Gen 1:26-28). The LORD God’s acknowledgment of this full capacity is not bad news. Indeed this

hand and take also from the Tree of Life and eat, and live forever (*vāḥay l'ōlām*).”²³ So the LORD God banished (*šillēḥ*) him from the Garden of Eden to work (*‘ābad*) the soil (*‘ādāmā*) from which he had been taken.²⁴ After he drove (*girēš*) the man out, he placed him (*vayyaškēn*) on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard (*šāmar*) the way to the Tree of Life.

Sapiential Commentary on Genesis 2-3

Job 28:25-28

²⁰ “Where then does wisdom (*ḥōkmā*) come from?

Where does understanding (*bînā*) dwell?

²¹ It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing,
concealed even from the birds of the air.

²² Destruction and Death say,

‘Only a rumor of it has reached our ears.’

²³ God understands the way to it

and he alone knows where it dwells,

²⁴ for he views the ends of the earth
and sees everything under the heavens.

²⁵ When he established the force of the wind
and measured out the waters,

²⁶ when he made a decree for the rain
and a path for the thunderstorm,

²⁷ then he looked at wisdom and appraised it;
he confirmed it and tested it.

²⁸ And he said to man,⁴³

‘The fear of the Lord⁴⁴—that is wisdom (*ḥōkmā*),
and to shun evil is understanding (*bînā*).’”

may now be viewed a great human achievement which along with coming to knowledge of coming to terms with their derived and mortal nature was one of the goals of the garden experience all along!

However, having now become ethically and morally powerful, humanity must not be allowed further access to the garden. The risk is that the primordial couple (continue to) eat (or eat for the first time) from the Tree of Life and thus lose all moral and ethical urgency through achieving eternal life. Thus, the final lesson humanity learns through the garden experience is that humankind may not eat from both trees at the same time. This means that persons may not function effectively as moral and ethical agents in the world and at the same time be eternal beings (never live in the shadow of death).

⁴³i.e. *lā’ādām*.

⁴⁴i.e. *‘ādōnāy*.